

Jana Staton, PhD, LCPC
Co-Chair, Leadership Team
Missoula Partners for Reintegration
629 Beverly Avenue
Missoula,, MT 59801
jstaton@montana.com

April 21, 2016

Statement for the Law and Justice Interim Committee

Chairman Sales, Members of the Committee:

My name is Jana Staton, Co-Chair of the Missoula Partners for Reintegration (PFR) Leadership Team, WWW.PFRMT.ORG.

PFR is here to support the State Reentry Task Force recommendations for housing initiatives for those reentering our communities. PFR is a community coalition of housing agencies and advocates, health providers, the faith community, employers, local elected officials and returning citizens, in partnership with DOC Probation and Parole.

PFR's mission is increase access employment, treatment, social support and housing. Success in reentering the community is like a 4-legged stool. Housing is the first and most critical leg; having stable housing ensures that individuals can succeed in finding work, healthy social support, continue treatment, and complying with parole requirements. Let me be blunt -- access to stable, safe housing for individuals with felony records who can be good tenants, is the #1 reentry need in our community. I'm talking about individuals who have completed treatment, come out clean or sober, are motivated and ready to turn their lives around, willing to work hard, go back to school, pay fines and restitution, take care of their kids or aging parents. Without more access to housing, our community-led efforts are not going to succeed, our recidivism rate will stay too high costing the state more and more money, and our communities will be less, not more safe.

I want to call your attention to the written comment submitted to the Committee by Michael Moore, part of PFR Leadership Team as the Coordinator of Reaching Home: Missoula's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. He points out the challenges of reentry housing as an indicator of Montana's problems with housing for all our citizens. He addresses the role the State of Montana can and should play as a partner with local communities to increase the housing supply. Only if stable housing is more accessible to returning citizens, along with the chronically homeless, mentally ill, families with children, will our communities be safer.

PFR is asking and encouraging this committee to give serious consideration to the recommendations of the State Reentry Task Force for housing initiatives, and to bring forth legislation for the next session that addresses those recommendations.

We particularly advocate for private sector incentives that will encourage landlords to consider individuals with felony records. Incentives such as tax credits, short-term housing assistance or vouchers do not mandate landlords to rent to every person who applies, but they can encourage individual consideration of those coming out of prison. State support and assistance can ensure that property management companies don't run afoul of new HUD guidelines. This new guidance points out that blanket denials of housing because of felony records can violate the Fair Housing Act, by disproportionately affecting racial minorities.